

British woman, 25, held in notorious Iranian prison after being arrested during rights protest

Campaigners say that Ghonche Ghavami is being kept in an isolation cell after attempting to enter an all-male stadium to draw attention to women's rights



Ghonche Ghavami has now been held for two months in Iran Photo: FACEBOOK

By Ahmed Vahdat

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A 25-year-old British-Iranian woman is being held in solitary confinement after being arrested during a women's rights protest in Tehran, according to campaigners.

Ghonche Ghavami was detained outside the city's Azadi Stadium after she and fellow campaigners tried to enter the men-only arena to watch an Iran-Italy volleyball match.

The protesters – who all wore white headscarves in defiance of the rules demanding dark coloured hijabs – had tried to get through heavy security but were arrested, said activists.

She was reportedly then released on bail, but after returning a week later to collect her belongings Ms Ghavami was arrested and put into solitary confinement in Iran's notorious Evin political prison.

Campaigners say she has now been held for two months, with 41 days in an isolation cell. There has been no explanation from the authorities, who have also raided her home.

Shiva Nazarahari, a prominent Iranian women's rights activist who herself has spent years behind bars for promoting civil rights in Iran, has taken up Ghonche's case by opening a Facebook campaign demanding her release.

"We just wanted to occupy a few seats in a stadium to cheer our national volleyball team in a stadium ironically called Azadi (meaning freedom in Persian).

But they [authorities] told us that there is no law in the country to allow women inside stadiums. In this country a woman who wants to watch a volleyball match has to be prepared to spend some time in prison later", she said on her Facebook.

A spokesperson for the Foreign Office confirmed the arrest but said diplomats had not been involved: "We are aware of reports of a dual British-Iranian national imprisoned in Iran, and are looking into them."

Iranian women's rights activists have long been a thorn in the side of the country's hardliners. With last year's election of president Hassan Rouhani, a self-declared moderate, they have increased their struggle for equality.

In another blow to promoters of women's rights, Iran's semi-official Fars news agency reported last week that Shahla Sherekat, a prominent journalist and editor of the monthly Zanane Emrooz (Today's Women) has been called to appear before Iran's Press Court, on charges of "promoting feminism".

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